Introduction:
The University of Colorado School of Medicine (CU SOM) Graduate Medical Education Committee (GMEC) requires each residency and fellowship program to develop policies to ensure the safe transfer of responsibility for patient care. The format for transfer of care may vary, but program standards must ensure continuous, coordinated delivery of care in settings that are appropriate to patients’ needs, including arrangements that extend beyond the inpatient setting into the community and the home.

Definition:
A structured handoff is the process of transferring information, authority, and responsibility for patients during transitions of care. Transitions include changes in providers (shift-to-shift, service-to-service) or when a patient is moved from one location or level of service to home or another level of care. Transitions may also be prompted due to caregiver fatigue.

Policy:
Each residency and fellowship program must develop a Transition of Care (Structured Patient Handoff) Policy that outlines the expectations for transfer of responsibility for patient care in all the settings/situations in which handoffs occur. The amount of information to be included in the process will vary depending on the functional role of the resident or fellow in patient care and the requirements of the clinical setting and facility. Residents and fellows providing continuous and direct care and taking responsibility for order writing require a higher level of information exchange than those with less continuous duties, such as consultative or supervisory services.

Per ACGME Common Program Requirements (VI.B. Transitions of Care), each program must:

1. Design clinical assignments to minimize the number of transitions in patient care.
2. Ensure and monitor effective, structured hand-over processes to facilitate both continuity of care and patient safety.
3. Ensure that residents and fellows are competent in communicating to the team members in the hand-over process.
4. Work with the sponsoring institutions to ensure the availability of schedules that inform all members of the health care team of attending physicians and fellows currently responsible for each patient’s care.

Click here for Guidelines for Minimal Handoff Requirements.